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CONTENTS

		PAGE
FAMILY PROGRESS	K. M. BAXTER	1
PLAYS IN CHURCHES (II) :		
THE PURPOSE OF A CHURCH PLAY	JOSEPH WESTMORELAND	5
THE FRENCH CHRISTIAN THEATRE :		
I. SOME PLAYWRIGHTS	REX PARKIN	9
II. SOME PLAYERS	FRANCIS GLENDENNING	10
QUIZ-MINDED ?		13
JOINING IN		14
NEWS OF THE OTHERS		15
R.D.S. NEWS AND NOTICES		21

FAMILY PROGRESS

By K. M. Baxter

" There are only three themes for drama—sex, blood, and religion. The first two have about shot their bolt with our generation ; it 's time the third had an innings."

A wild statement. Has it any elements of truth ?

No doubt a number of plays on religious themes have reached the professional theatre this year. *Murder in the Cathedral* drew its usual full houses at the Mercury ; there have also been new contributions. Some were not worth critical appraisal, but *Now Barabbas*, a play about prison life, made a name for its previously unknown pacifist author ; *Family Portrait* delighted Fay Compton's many fans with its picture of a Mother trying to explain a difficult Son to the rest of the family ; *The Vigil* showed counsel for defence and prosecution of the Gardener on a charge of Body-snatching, the trial being skilfully conducted in the idiom of a modern American courtroom ; and, finally, the *Pilgrim's Progress*, at Covent Garden, presented with every available " moving accident ", with pomp of rising stages, with circumstantial fire, with lightnings and gauzes, with ballet " and with music, with soldier, and with priest ", with buds and belles and stars without a name, through the generosity of the Proprietors of *The Daily Telegraph*, in commemoration of the 250th Anniversary of the S.P.C.K. All these drew houses varying from good to superlative, and it is impossible to imagine such a state of affairs ten years ago. Yes, it looks as though there may well be a revival of interest in religion as a theme for drama.

What Religion ? That is the question which readers of this journal must ask. And, if it is having an innings, what is the wicket like ? and how is the score going ?

Let us, at once, abandon this cricketing metaphor which though topical while we write, will be well out of date when and if we are read. We mistrust our cricket anyway. Over!

Perhaps it will be helpful in trying to clear our minds about the nature of these religious plays, their public and their effect, if we limit our discussion to two, very widely different.

Let us take first, *Family Portrait.*

Its authors, by name Coffee and Cowan, are American and the whole Portrait, though ostensibly Palestinian, has an American small-town atmosphere such as one meets in the Women's Magazines ; that is to say not very real—not an *Our Town* atmosphere. Into this setting are placed the traditional characters, in particular Mary, the widow of Joseph the Carpenter, and the Mother of an absentee Son, Jesus; the Mother also of a family (surely less attractive than most families) united only by a desire to get on in the world, and by their irritation at the tiresome behaviour of their elder Brother. The fortunes of the family flow to and fro, according to the alternating success or failure of this Brother as a popular preacher : we see His Mother becoming increasingly upset by the whole affair and, at last, driven by maternal anxiety, going to Jerusalem to see if she can find Him. A young man, rushing distraught up the steep dark street stops to direct her and her companion to the room where the Master and his disciples are at supper; stops, and dashes on into the night. But Judas is not a reliable guide and when they reach the spot the women find the Room deserted and, supported by the understanding of Mary Magdalen, the Mother is left to listen to the tread of the guard turned out to capture her Son. Years later, when all the scandal has died down, the Mother asks her youngest child to call his new-born infant Jesus, so that Her Eldest shall not be wholly forgotten. Very touching; very wistful; very fragrant. Only the fact of the Resurrection is never mentioned. Not once. There is a parenthetic hint of a rumour, but that is all. Moreover, we learn that all through the last days of His ministry, Our Lord had only one message—that we should all be kind to one another; and why, asks the unhappy Mother, why should they want to kill Him for that ? Why, indeed ? " *I am the Way, the Truth, the Life . . . the Door, . . . the Shepherd . . . the Vine . . . the Son of God. . . .*" Leaving aside all question of the ethical teaching of Christ (rather under-estimated if put only at " kindness " ?) the play entirely ignores the Messianic claims, of which even this family, being orthodox Jews, must have been aware, and still more completely does it ignore the Christian's centre of faith, the Resurrection. It isn't that the family ignores this. One might conceive of a play in which the Appearances were dismissed as a regrettable popular myth and the whole of Acts explained away. But no. The play itself ignores the Resurrection. So it is not the Christian religion that is here the theme of Miss Lenore Coffee and friend.

Yet it was immensely liked as a play. Why ? and by whom ? Well, perhaps chiefly by those who have steadily admired Fay Compton all the way from her *Dear Brutus* days; and her technique for expressing human wistfulness is certainly beyond criticism. But also it was liked by many who aren't wholly materialists, who would (also rather wistfully) prefer ' to remember for years, to remember with tears ' a

beautiful life sacrificed for a high ideal, and who feel somehow the better for thinking of the way Jesus went about doing good, before State Medicine, or Emancipated Women, or the Atom Bomb. " A wonderful person: I wish I had known him." *Glorified " with the Glory I had with Thee before the world was."* No. This couldn't be a play for Christians!

Yet, if people will go to see this, how they would go to see the plays yet to be written about the Christian faith!

I emerged from the Theatre with my Good Pagan host, who said in a thoughtful tone, " I see the difference."

" What difference ? " I asked.

" Between that sort of gup, and the N.T."

I said, " Could we have a beer ? "

He said, " Is that what you mean by ' inspired writing ' ? "

" Which ? " I said.

" Well, not Coffee," said he.

" No," I said, " I said beer."

" Which is the shortest book ? " he said.

" Mark," said I, " but try John, too."

So you see ? Perhaps after all it is our fault and our folly if we don't welcome Family Portraits into the gallery. You never know what they will start.

You never know ; and we are in a desperate pass. It is doubtful if all the Spartans who stood and fell at Thermopylæ understood the full implications of their stand. Yet since they were willing and brave enough to stand and fight beside their more enlightened compeers, Sparta deemed them worthy to share in the heroic epitaph. *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus* may by some be thought a fit motto for Christian Drama, but in our view R.D.S. should welcome as allies all who are concerned with a serious consideration of spiritual values, believing as we do that such consideration is a pre-requisite condition for the next step in any pilgrim's progress.

And to the Progress, by a swift transition, we now turn our attention.

This production is a puzzle.

Whereas in *Family Portrait* the critic's predominant feeling was that it was a humanist misinterpretation of the Divine story, there is no doubt that *The Pilgrim's Progress from This world to the Next*, concerned though it be with man and his actions, is God-centred. There 's no denying its Christianity. Nor is there any denying that every seat in Covent Garden was taken and " hundreds turned away " during its all-too-brief sixteen-day run.

But here is the puzzle. With all this public enthusiasm, the atmosphere, torrid outside, remained entirely cool within. Why ?

Why ? The production, admirable in intent, lavish in montage, professional in performance, and faithful to its text—Why did it leave us, on that sweltering evening, tepid ? Why ? I returned home, brooding. Late and slowly, I foraged among the critics. Which of the great could solve this puzzle for me ?

And at last, in a wholly unexpected quarter—Macaulay—I found the clue. It lay hidden in two sentences.

The first.[1] " In England, it not infrequently happens that a tinker or a coalheaver hears a sermon or falls in with a tract which alarms him about the state of his soul."

The second.[2] " Religion has scarcely ever worn a form so calm and soothing as in (Bunyan's) allegory; the feeling which predominates is a feeling of tenderness for weak, timid, and harassed minds."

Pondering these two sentences I found a reason why, in that vast auditorium the flame of genuine drama never kindled, why there was not a watt, nor an ohm, of the unmistakable electric current which, generated in the powerhouse of true dramatic creation, throbs between actor and audience. I do not speak of individual emotional experiences : I am referring here only to the mass-reaction which any experienced playgoer can detect.

What was the reason, then ?

First, I believe, it was that, in England now (contrary to Macaulay's dictum) it is of the rarest infrequency that tinker, coalheaver, artist, or civil servant, over the age of twenty-one, experiences any alarm whatever about the state of his soul. Alarms he knows indeed—about his purse, his health, his wardrobe, his political party or the security of his children—matters which Christian treats as very secondary. But the state of his soul he generally disregards, unless something very unbiddable about it obtrudes too violently into his business, sexual, or social relationships, when if he can afford it he goes to court or to a psychologist, and if he can't he retires more economically to gaol or the gas oven. What he seldom does is to consult Evangelist or Interpreter. Now to Bunyan, and to Macaulay, separated though they are in time, the problems besetting " weak, timid, and harassed minds " would appear as religious problems, recognized as such. So that the " tenderness " of the allegory and its soothing effects are, for our age, devoted largely to the wrong themes. If adults think at all on spiritual matters, it is difficult for them to attach overwhelming importance to individual salvation. We want an allegory which will reassure us about the global stability of the pound sterling, world wheat, or the state of international atomic research.

Or do we ?

Paradoxically, the one theme treated in this version of the book, which came slap home to our business and bosoms was the scene between Christian and Hopeful, the discussion on suicide. One listened to it with a mental image of the band of Greathearts of our own day who, too long subjected to the brutal onslaughts of Despair and deprived of Hopeful's loving companionship, have surrendered or foundered. Here the allegory was indeed so apposite to our mood, so clear in its showing of man's need for a human voice to repeat the Divine injunction, that the response from the listeners was strong and positive, a response of an almost personal sort, as to a charge to be more ready with the lovely hopeful words: " We know in Whom we have

[1] Review of von Ranke's *History of the Popes*, Oct. 1840.
[2] Review of Southey's edition of *Pilgrim's Progress*, Dec. 1831.

believed ". This, and the " Who shall separate us from the Love of God ? " hit us where we live, and by this scene, if by no other, the production would be justified.

The howling schoolboy maintains that one swallow does not make a meal. Certainly one good scene does not make a drama. If it is as drama that we consider this production it must be acknowledged a failure.

But if we regard it (in the words of a critic in the national press) as an illustrated edition of the book, we can accept it with joy, thankful ourselves for the opportunity to hear the limpid and courageous words again, and for the chance that many people had to hear them new.

For us it was a muster of old friends, but we can hope that Faithful's noble and happy bearing thrilled some young hearts, that the calm beauty of Discretion's diction and appearance cooled many a harassed housewife's breast, and that somewhere in factory or workroom or canteen or hospital ward the music of " My heart ever faithful ", still wings the feet of some unregarded saint who heard it for the first time.

No. This is not Christian Drama. But there are other forms of Christian entertainment, and is it not a remarkable portent that this form, in 1948, should pack Covent Garden from floor to ceiling ?

While it is yet dark, is there faintly a light, low down on the horizon, towards the morning, right plumb over Vanity Fair itself ? Are you, who point it out to me, of the family of Vain Confidence ? Or do I, fugitive daughter of Diffidence, fear to call you by your right name, Friend Hopeful ?

Do I sleep ? Do I dream ? Or *is* Visions about ?

Fr. Westmoreland's article is the second of a series by several contributors dealing with different aspects of this subject.

PLAYS IN CHURCHES (II)

—THE PURPOSE OF A CHURCH PLAY

By Joseph Westmoreland

There is a law, still unrescinded, in the Church of England, which forbids plays in churches, giving charge to churchwardens to put a stop to them. The seeking of the bishop's permission, then, before presenting a play in church, would seem to be more than a matter of courtesy. Most diocesan bishops are, in fact, willing and ready to grant permission, if they are assured of the suitability of the play, and the worthiness of its production. Even so, there is little doubt that nowadays we present plays in churches far too readily, and with too little forethought. Many of the plays that are presented in churches, would be better presented in halls or theatres; a very few that are presented in halls and theatres, would be better presented in church. All of us who produce church plays might do worse, before we begin, than read Mr. J. N. Comper's pamphlet, " Of the Atmosphere of a

Church." None of us would agree with what he says there, directly about stage-plays ; we should all take to heart what he has to say about the church and its function. If, as a result, we are a little more hesitant, at least we should be clearer in our minds, as to the true purpose of a church play.

With all that was written in the first article in this series, in the June number of *Christian Drama*, most parish priests would agree, from their own point of view. It is as wrong as it is unnecessary, to pretend that a church is a theatre, or to imagine that a play written intentionally for performance on a proscenium stage, can be produced, easily and satisfactorily, in church. The two are not competitive; they are complementary. The custom, in some large churches, of building a stage against the west wall of the nave, and turning the congregation round to face it, is one that needs to be heavily discouraged. It is right and proper to accept the building as it is, so that the congregation, coming to it for the play, recognize it still as a church, their church, where they have come to worship, with none of the associations of worship done away. Often, in church production, a technique is employed, which is in ill accord with church behaviour and worship-behaviour. Most of us could do far more about this than we do. There are possibilities which will richly repay the trouble of exploration, by helping to achieve and maintain a harmony between the play and the normal life of the church. The church play is not, or at any rate, should not be, something that is awkwardly, if splendidly isolated from the pattern of the church's worship. There is a unity, a rightness, that we can all have, if we will go to greater trouble and exercise more care.

It is obviously right, too, to use the whole building, if we can. This will help to bind the play still closer to the normal worshipful use of the church. But it is doubtful if medieval practice in this matter could be revived, even if it were desirable. In those days, the loci, or places of action, could, apparently, be spread all over the building. Churches served smaller populations, and the absence, or, at least, rareness, of fixed seating, meant a congregation as free to move as the players. It is good, too, to take advantage of architectural features, as well as of fixtures. But because we see in such things something readily available and suitable in the production of a particular play, it does not follow that the play in question is suitable for presentation in church. It is easy to be deceived about this, if the approach is made in terms of building, rather than church. The fact that in presenting *Murder in the Cathedral*, the pulpit can appropriately be used for the sermon, and the sanctuary for the murder, is not reason enough for regarding *Murder in the Cathedral* as a church play. And again, we have to be very careful about the use we make of places and furniture. Perhaps nowhere do associations strike so deeply as in a church. The sight of Pilate, sitting in the bishop's chair, washing his hands, has, on one occasion, called forth observations more pungent than edifying. On the other hand, the age-long connection between tombs and altars, would make an altar a very good place for a Resurrection scene, as indeed, was the case in the earliest liturgical plays ; and the tomb of a

faithful Christian (if not over-elaborate and pretentious, as some are) might well serve the same purpose. The sanctuary could be the scene of a martyrdom, if the implications of such an action taking place there, are understood. But then, the implications are so soul-shaking, that it is doubtful if any but very few, amongst the devout as well as sensitive, could maintain the performance. There are situations in which even the artist is dumb, and it is right that it should be so. Perhaps I raise here a question which needs for its discussion far more space than can be given in a short article.[1] It is a question, however, that does bring us closer to the heart of this matter of church drama. For it is not the church in its incidentals, but the church in its nature, that is of the first importance. A church is a place of worship, that is, of the Church's worship. Jesus said, " Where is the guest-chamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples." A church is where the altar is. It is that in which is set forth, before God and man, the redemption of man by God, in the God-man, and where, in the same act, is declared the mystery of the Church's own being. For that, the church exists. That is the true setting of our plays. We have to consider them in their setting.

The old liturgical plays were completely at home in the church, because they were developments within the Act of Worship. Almost all our modern plays are what might be called importations from without, and for that reason, they will probably never belong to the church in the same full and satisfying way. That does not mean that they cannot belong to the church in their own way. It is the quality of worship in a play that is the real test of its suitability, and it may well be that the simple showing of the Mysteries of the Gospel will pass this test more adequately than anything else, unless it be a play in which worship, and the Mystery, and application to life, all combine in what is in effect a call to adoration and penitence. Such a play is the Ghéon fragment, *The Way of the Cross*. But that is a play that has grown directly out of an act of, in this case, non-liturgical worship.

But a church is a place in which, by long custom, the Gospel of Redemption is not only set forth, but preached and taught. The priest, at his ordination, is given authority to preach the Word of God. He is charged, too, to minister the doctrine of Christ as the Church has received it. This is a grave matter. His church, and the pulpit in his church, are not there for the expounding of the priest's own ideas and speculations, but for the teaching of the Faith of the Church. It is clearly his duty, also, to see that any plays performed in his church, shall fulfil the same condition. These are days in which there is not only much loose thinking, but widespread ignorance of the Faith. What people see and hear in a church, they not unnaturally conclude to be the teaching of the Church. We would not have it otherwise, unless we would be the authors of confusion. Whatever may be the place for the type of religious play that can be called speculative or exploratory—and I am sure that it has a place—that place is not within the four walls of a church. There are plays, too, some of them dealing

[1] Yes, indeed.—Ed.

with biblical subjects, even with the Passion, which minimize or hide the true nature of sin, and pervert the doctrine of redemption. There is a particular danger from the modern play with the humanistic approach. Whatever the artist may think, the priest has to be on his guard. It is he who is eventually responsible, and he has a solemn duty.

There are two less important matters which come within the priest's province. This article would not be complete without some mention of them.

Who shall take part in a church play? I am sure that every priest must see that it is often a very good thing for someone who is not a convinced and practising Christian, to have the experience of playing in a deeply religious play. How far that opinion has to be modified when the play is presented in church, it is not easy to say. Some would declare that it needed no modification. I think it does, at least, as far as some characters are concerned. Not very long ago, a young professional actress gave a lovely performance as the Madonna, in church. On the following Sunday morning, her hostess said to her, "I am nearly ready for church. Are you coming?" "No, thank you," was the reply, "I want to write my letters." Doubtless, this trivial incident made no difference to the worth of the performance, as such. Certainly, had the play been presented in a theatre, the incident itself would have passed unnoticed. As it was, it caused distress. It might well have been the source of a good deal of harm. We have to be very careful, not to put stumbling-blocks in the way of any of God's children. And we have to take them all as they are, not only those whom we wish to act in our plays.

Over the matter of prayers at a church play, there has been, in the past, some blundering on the part of priests. On the other hand, I am sure that something in the way of directed devotion is nearly always desirable. It is easy, but not always right, to attribute to others our own degree of sensitivity. Audiences vary greatly, and often they are very mixed, but for the most part, our people are largely inarticulate, and they are grateful, both for direction, and for the expression that a spoken prayer can give. It should be very little, at the end. And certainly, I think, there should be no extraneous hymn-singing. What of the beginning? When I have asked permission to have plays in my church, it has been given, with the words, "after Evensong." This is in accord with the directions of the early plays, almost all of which, say, "Mattins (or Terce, or None) having been said." Some players find it difficult not to be openly irritated by this, and some of their reasons may be justified. But if a play suffers rather than gains, from being preceded by a short liturgical office, can it be that there is something, either in the play or in its production, which makes it unsuitable as a church play?

Lastly, while I appreciate the need to rehearse on the spot, I am sure that all priests would be grateful, if producers of church plays could do as much rehearsing as possible, outside the church. Normally, the church should be a quiet place—and often, it is the only quiet place—where people can say their prayers.

THE FRENCH CHRISTIAN THEATRE

I. SOME PLAYWRIGHTS

By Rex Parkin

The French Christian Theatre owes its existence and its fame to one man, Henri Ghéon. Ghéon was a great Catholic Christian and a true dramatist. He died in 1944, just three days before D Day. He wrote a large number of plays, only a few of which are procurable in French and fewer still in English. A volume of his plays in English containing *The Comedian*, *The Marriage of St. Francis*, and *The Marvellous History of St. Bernard*, may he hired from the Religious Drama Society Library. The last of these is probably the best known, though the other two are superior dramatically. *The Comedian* is considered by many critics to be the best play Ghéon ever wrote, and *The Marriage of St. Francis* is a lovely thing. I am told on good French authority that a play called *St. Giles* was, in Ghéon's own opinion and that of the critics, his crowning drama, but it has been out of print for some years now. Perhaps the greatest dramatic piece Ghéon ever wrote is an excerpt from a full-length historical play, *The Mystery of the Finding of the Cross*, written for the opening of a Monastery in Belgium. This piece is *The Way of the Cross*, a powerful dramatization of the Stations of the Cross in stylized form. This was toured by the Pilgrim Players during the War, and my own Group, " Drama Christi " toured it during the Lents of 1947 and 1948. Producers fight shy of this lovely work, chiefly, I think, because stylization is at present an unfamiliar form. It plays for about an hour and always leaves a lasting impression of solemnity and power. Mention must be made of a Nativity Play, *Noël sur la Place* rather awkwardly translated into *Christmas in the Market Place*.[1] This is a simple, sincere, holy, merry, and natural play in the manner of the Medieval Mysteries, and requires a cast of only five. Ghéon was not only playwright, but producer and actor as well. He ran a Group of players known as " Les Compagnons de Notre Dame ", whom he produced himself in the first performances of his own plays.

The second name which deserves honourable mention is that of Henri Brochet, friend and admirer of Henri Ghéon and a member of his acting Group. M. Brochet is himself a prolific playwright, having written more than a hundred and fifty plays, as well as producer and actor, and he is writing still. Only a month ago he sent me a copy of his latest effort. Brochet directs a small band of players known as " Les Compagnons des Jeux ", for whom, incidentally, Ghéon wrote *Noël sur la Place*. None of Brochet's plays has as yet been translated into English, though I am struggling with one or two of them. They are for the most part Festival Plays on the lives of Saints, written for production in the open air, with large casts. There seems to be no timber shortage in France; it prohibits the mounting of plays in such manner in this country. He has also written some charming plays for

[1] Copies of this and of *The Way of the Cross* obtainable from the R.D.S. library.

children, which we hope to translate as time offers. Brochet edits a small magazine entitled *Jeux, Tréteaux et Personnages*, which appears six times a year, and which collects information about Christian Drama from countries all over the world. It generally contains a play by himself or a translation of a foreign play. A French version of Yeats' *The Hour Glass* appeared in a recent number, also of Freda Collins' *St. Jerome and the Lion.*

Now a word in general about the French Christian Theatre. It must be admitted that theologically and dramatically these plays are superior to ours. I say " theologically and dramatically " because in Christian plays a sound knowledge of theology is as necessary as practised dramatic ability. A Christian play without a theological spine to give it poise and grace of movement, is like a ship without a rudder, a poor palsied invertebrate. We need in this country sound theologians with an instinct for drama, or pratised dramatists with a knowledge and appreciation of Christian theology. As it is, our dramatists and poets are innocent of theology and our theologians are without drama. There are some brilliant exceptions, notably T. S. Eliot and Philip Lamb. Henri Ghéon combined these gifts in a high degree, so in a measure does Brochet. It is just this combination which gives drive and force to *The Way of the Cross*, *Christmas in the Market Place*, and *The Comedian.* It is the lack of this combination which makes our own plays dull and shapeless and sentimental. Let me end with an appeal to Christian theologians, especially priests, to test whether God has lodged with them a dramatic sense, by which they may bring life and conviction to the theology they love so well. It is, after all, a tradition that *Everyman*, greatest of religious plays, was written by a parish priest.

II. SOME PLAYERS

By Francis Glendenning

It seems clear from contacts that the R.D.S. is making outside this country that the Christian Church is finding within the Drama an extremely potent means of bringing the Gospel to the people. Recent correspondence and exchange of publications with the Conseil Protestant de la Jeunesse in Paris has brought to light yet another exciting experiment—Jeu Dramatique—which is now gathering momentum in the French Protestant Church. M. Daniel Leveugle, who is a professional actor, has been commissioned by the C.P.J. to be responsible for " l'évangelisation par le jeu dramatique ", and he and other experts are training French Christians in the craft of the theatre.

Certain assumptions underlying their work are contained in a pamphlet written by Germaine Bailly. " Théâtre et Evangelisation." These may be summarized briefly: " The world keeps at a distance from the Church, and this may be because the Church itself is cut off from the world. The drama is a potent means of healing this breach. The theatre is popular in France (more so than the cinema). Its words, movement and characters, illustrate a situation or an idea or a story.

Human life is set before us with its joys and sorrows. French people have always loved the theatre and, as in the Middle Ages, the drama has once again to learn its vocation to speak directly of the things of God." Daniel Leveugle writes also : " The theatre is an exceptionally favourable place for the Word. The actors speak to a crowd of people who have come on purpose to *listen* and to *see*. In a sense there is very little difference between the preacher and the actor." And (Germaine Bailly again): " The greatest value of the drama is not that it solves the problems of the world, but that it makes the audience ask the questions which the play asks: the questions of life, destiny and origin, which are the first step towards God."

The first organized attempt to produce Christian Drama arose during the Occupation with a team of young people who called themselves the " Tréteau Routier ". They hid from the Germans and travelled about France performing various plays in the parishes. Then in August, 1945, the C.P.J. organized the first Camp of " Evangelisation par le théâtre ", at Montbeliard. It was attended by about forty people. For ten days two groups worked on the theme of a possible play, developed their own characters and dialogue, and put this play of their own into production. For another ten days they toured the towns and villages in the area. Before each performance the leader of the group spoke about the play, and afterwards the play was discussed with the audience.

In August, 1946, it was possible to arrange three of these camps in the Midi, the Manche, and the Pas de Calais. This time they used the theme of Dostoievsky's *Crime and Punishment* for their production, built a set and made costumes. But the results of this camp convinced the C.P.J. that more emphasis must now be placed on technique, and M. Leveugle proceeded to organize camps for mime, dancing, speech, movement, set and costume designing, etc. In this venture the main problem was finding students who could spare the time to attend.

In August, 1947, a camp was held in the Val de Loire. The theme for production was Dostoievsky's *The Grand Inquisitor*. One evening when a group was touring this production, some communists were in the audience and kept interrupting the performance. Leveugle tells of how during an interval he went in front and told them that if they did not agree with what they heard and saw, they must come backstage after the performance and then they could thrash it out together. This the Marxists agreed to do, and afterwards a discussion was carried on until 3 a.m., at which time the Marxists left on much more friendly terms.

The purpose of constructing plays during the period of production is an attempt to ensure that the drama is the " People's drama "—a return to medieval principle. The purpose also of the concentrated work in summer camps is eventually (so M. Leveugle hopes) to provide a group of players to tour under his direction, comparable to Drama Christi, Sheffield Christian Community Players, and others in this country.

A recent publication entitled *Jeu Dramatique* is designed to assist Christians in the parishes. It contains most useful information about the possibilities and hopes of this new drama movement. And there are interesting notes on décor, lighting, costume, staging, noises-off, make-up and speech (including choric speaking). Half the book is devoted to themes for productions—skeleton plays—the canvas upon which the acting groups can paint their picture in their own way. They are based on words from Scripture, set in our contemporary world. " If thine enemy hunger, feed him " is set in Russia and Siberia. " The man who beheld himself in a mirror " is to be set in China. There is also an interesting article suggesting how the parable of the Vineyard might be produced as a purely biblical play. But these are only sugestions to set the producer and his cast moving. The whole idea is a genuine attempt to adapt religious drama to the needs of the people and indeed of the actors themselves.

It is important to realize the difficulties under which the French Protestant Church is working in this department of its life. It asserts not only that its amateur actors are deficient in technique, but it suffers from a lack of Christian plays. These " thèmes de jeux " which have just been mentioned, are of course designed to meet a different need from the carefully written full-length play of the dramatist. But in a recent competition organized by the C.P.J. to encourage Christian dramatists, the standard of play writing was not good enough to warrant the award of a first prize. It is unlikely that this situation will obtain for long. There is real life in this French movement, and as Jacques Hilling writes : " The proper dramatist does not write his plays in the seclusion of a library. They are born from the unit between the stage and the people." Once this unity is really established again, the dramatists will arise.

These men and women in France see that their work stands or falls by their faithfulness to God's Word and by their faithfulness to the art-form of the theatre. They are definite, precise, and humble about all this. And their problems are our problems as well. We join them from within the Mystical Body of Christ, as together we seek God's Glory through the Drama. It gives us great happiness in this country to know that we are now linked with them in the work that we do together in the Church. They are grateful to know of our work, as we are of their's. As problems of communication and travel become easier, it is clear that more personal contact will be extremely valuable, and the desire of these French Christians to see the rebirth of an authentic Christian Drama in France asks our prayers.

CHRISTIAN DRAMA is the quarterly magazine of the Religious Drama Society. *President*: The Lord Bishop of Chichester. *Hon. Director*: E. Martin Browne. *Chairman of Council*: Miss Athene Seyler. *Travelling Adviser*: Miss Carina Robins. *Librarian*: Miss K. Bainbridge-Bell. *Secretary*: T. G. Bartholomew. All enquiries and applications for membership should be addressed to The Secretary, R.D.S., S.P.C.K. House, Northumberland Avenue, W.C. 2.

QUIZ-MINDED?

Why wait for P.E.P. or Gallup? Let's take our own poll of the erudition of R.D.S.

1. What is or are :—cyclorama; false proscenium; groundrow; flats, floats, and floods; props; counterweights; deadheads; panatrope?

2. In what plays by what authors do the following characters appear:—The Button-moulder, Aleel, Lilith, Father Opine, Delilah, Talkative, Harry Monchesney, Mephistopheles, Noah?

3. What are or is:—Burnous, Arghileh, Parka, Caftan, Woad, Gaberdine, Tarboosh, Sari; which would be appropriate to a play set in Palestine?

4. Who wrote:—The Marvellous History of St. Bernard, Outward Bound, The Firstborn, Go Down Moses, The Stars Bow Down?

5. Name any play or film of this century which deals seriously with the following themes:—Conversion, miracles, divorce, belief in a future life, vocation, the mission field, holy poverty, martyrdom, loyalty, mass-education.

6. Given that Shakespeare wrote all the following lines, to which characters do you assign them, and what do you deduce from them about Shakespeare's beliefs?

   (*a*) I tell thee, churlish priest,
   A ministering angel shall my sister be
   When thou liest howling. (*Hamlet.*)

   (*b*) If that the heavens do not their visible spirits
   Send quickly down to tame these vile offences
   It will come,
   Humanity must perforce prey on itself
   Like monsters of the deep. (*King Lear.*)

   (*c*) O Thou whose captain I account myself,
   Look on my forces with a gracious eye . . .
   Make us Thy ministers of chastisement
   That we may praise Thee in Thy victory. (*Richard III.*)

   (*d*) Golden lads and girls all must
   Consign to thee, and come to dust. (*Cymbeline.*)

   (*e*) So a' cried out " God, God, God ", three or four times. Now, I, to comfort him, bid him a' should not think of God. I hoped there was no need to trouble himself with any such thought yet.
   (*Henry V.*)

Answers? No indeed! We know our own limitations: wrangle it out among your friends.

JOINING IN

From Vancouver, B.C., comes this cheerful epistle—and in a further letter the writer promises us six new contributors. Many thanks, Sir.

30 *May*, 1948

The Editor, Dear Sir,

May I congratulate you on the most interesting and provocative number that you have given us for February. It answers some of the questions that I have been asking for a long time about the quality of the output in religious drama in England. I wondered how many stained-glass-window saints had been walking stiffly about the stage, and how long pseudo-Tudor English was to be the required language for religious drama. Your editorial, articles and limerick have eased my mind. I no longer have to condemn myself as a crank because I do not like " pretty, pretty playlets like animated Christmas cribs ", or because I regard tinsel haloes as " vulgar ". The " considered appraisal " by Terence Vale of Clay's *Nativity* is a very valuable piece of criticism. I thoroughly enjoyed *The Hyaena and the Bone*, too, although there is one point in which my experience differs from Mr. Coghill's. He doubts if " modern plays on the medieval principle of retelling the Bible story would be effective ". He says that " people who go to the theatres are for the most part educated and know the (Bible) story already ". This may have been so in the England of my boyhood, but is not so in the Canada of this generation. I find it safe to assume that most of my audience know nothing whatever of the story; and those that know it well, certainly like to see the simple Bible histories portrayed. The type of Bible play that I lean to is one in which the Bible story is told as directly as possible in modern English, rounded out, of course, to make an adequate play, and making full use of modern knowledge, but endeavouring to let the story give its own message without trying to prove a theory. (I frankly admit that the latter is not so easy as it sounds.)

The other type of religious play that I favour is the type that shows the working of the Holy Spirit in modern human relationships, or to use Mr. Coghill's words, " which show the Christian qualities fighting in a natural world for supernatural standards ". . . .

(Signed) Charles W. Wright.

NEWS OF THE OTHERS

STAR TURNS

We print as our first Star Turn Carina Robins' Report of the first Regional Conference held on June 1st, 1948, at S.P.C.K. House—for it is of great importance to all groups that this interchange of ideas should continue. We follow this report with news of Hereford, and Kelly, the former selected for the variety, the latter for the continuity of their record.

This Conference, the first of it's kind to be held, was conducted in an informal manner and in a spirit of friendliness and co-operation. Seventeen members were present.

Each member in turn told of religious drama activities in his or her area, of the difficulties, achievements, and hopes.

Then followed a general discussion, a summary of which here follows:—

Members were amazed at the variety of local organizations. For instance, they were told of County Organizations such as Oxford, Sussex, and Cornwall: of Diocesan organizations such as Liverpool and St. Alban's: of town organizations, for instance Sheffield, and, we hope, Bexhill; of Free Church organizations such as the Congregational Union Drama Panel, covering the whole country. We also heard of individuals who while employed on other work such as Assistant Director of Education or Sunday School Organizer, are using religious drama as a method of evangelism.

We heard of difficulties met in forming organizations; transport, people too busy to attend meetings, finance, misunderstanding between churches in some areas, for instance in Cornwall. Some members told of the preference of local drama groups to continue entirely on their own, rather than co-operate with one another, e.g.: Birmingham and Bexhill. And yet the need for local centres is obvious, especially as for many small groups the R.D.S. Central Body seems too remote. We were told of the need for simple mimes and variety programmes for inexperienced groups who only consider religious drama as one of many activities. Many members spoke of the low standards of the majority of religious plays seen.

All this points to the need of LEADERSHIP.

We heard of some marvellous work achieved with wholly inexperienced people, under expert guidance: for instance, Pamela Keily at Sheffield, Elisabeth Heward-Bowyer in Derbyshire, Dorothy Carr in Durham, and Miss Murray Andrews just beginning in Cornwall. These people spoke of the appreciation of good plays, and Miss Keily mentioned that she was rehearsing *Murder in the Cathedral* with a cast of young people drawn from various Youth Clubs in Sheffield. Every county or area needs a Religious Drama Adviser or Producer to encourage and guide local initiative.

We learn much about the possibilities of co-operation with County Drama Committees and Organizers. Dorothy Carr of Durham, and

Mrs. Heward-Bowyer of Derby told of what had been achieved in their counties. We believe that much more can be done along these lines, and financial assistance can be given to further the development of Religious Drama.

The need for closer co-operation with the Central Body was stressed. It was realized that while there was great diversity of method and organization throughout the country, the aim of those engaged in religious drama was the same as that of the Central Body, and that this aim cannot be achieved effectively, in isolation from the movement as a whole.

Emphasis was laid on the advisability of organizing religious drama on inter-denominational lines wherever possible.

Finally the members unanimously expressed their appreciation of this Conference, and asked that future conferences of this kind should be held annually.

Hereford.

R. H. Ward's beautiful play *The Prodigal Son* has now been presented nearly twenty times by the Hereford Cathedral Players.

This small amateur company was formed during the Autumn of last year to present Drama as a branch of religious education within the Hereford Diocese. It is completely self-contained, carrying its own lighting equipment, etc., and the whole cast, complete with costumes, lighting, etc., is packed into two cars. *The Prodigal Son* was chosen as the first play to be produced because of its suitability for all seasons of the Church year, its adaptability, and its small cast—six players.

The great variety of churches in which the play has been produced has ranged from the spaciousness of the Cathedral itself and the great Parish Church of Ludlow to the intimacy of tiny and remote village churches—from Norman to galvanized iron. In one small parish it was even necessary to remove the pulpit and choir stalls temporarily to provide sufficient space for the central action of the play. This wide variety of playing conditions calls for quite a degree of adaptability from the Players but also has compensations in the freshness which it gives to every performance.

The play is given as an integral part of Sunday evensong, taking the place of an address, and its reception has been so appreciative that it is felt that the work is of considerable value and that it will continue to play a part in the Church life of the Diocese.

K. G. P.

Poor Man's Miracle. The Kelly Players. Ascension Day.

The Kelly players are one of those pioneer village groups in Religious Drama, who have continued without a pause since 1918, gradually developing both their dramatic sense and their ideas on religion. Beginning with Old Testament plays, in which flocks and herds played a part, and the patriarchs closely resembled the modern patriarchs of

the farms, they have now achieved this difficult, profound, and provocative play, with the help of more sophisticated players from the towns, who join them on their own ground and play with a sincerity that is like their own. The play has two very dramatic scenes in which the crowd plays an important part, and the producer had handled these scenes with a sure touch, bringing out the wave of religious hysteria and the terror of the law, together with the innate kindness and faith of the tenement dwellers with great skill and understanding. She had cut a good deal of the metaphysical discussions which formed a large part of the play, but the essential discussion—" What is Faith? What is Justice? and What is a Miracle? " remained, and remained with the players and the audience after the play was over. In fact, when the curtain fell, a group of players and friends just continued it behind the scenes, until time ran short. The young mystic and his work-worn mother-in-law, played with almost professional skill, the latter especially carrying complete conviction in every movement and every piece of timing; the crowd had a style of their own, grown over thirty years into real community playing, and the more sophisticated parts were all played with dignity and reality. Frances Hainnsselin, the producer, being born in the district, and having worked with many types of players in the South-West, has developed a method of reaching what is best in her cast, and of giving it that stage sense which is often lacking in village players. The audience listened with intent interest to the whole play, and went away ready to discuss its meaning; yet people will always say, " You can't give a village audience anything but comedy." Let them visit Kelly on Ascension Day.

Forthcoming Notice.

During this summer there have been two productions of Charles Williams' *The House of the Octopus* : the first was given by members of the Student Christian Movement at Oxford, and produced by Albert Nelmes ; the second was presented in the Quarry Theatre, Mirfield, under the direction of Helen Lamb. The attempt to do justice to what we believe to be occasions of unusual endeavour and considerable achievement must be deferred until our next issue.

A POET SEEKS LODGINGS

" . . . *forasmuch as the undersigned has committed, transferred, given up, made over, consigned, and aberrated himself, to the art and mystery of poetry; forasmuch as he hath cut, rebuffed, affronted, huffed, and shirked, and taken stint at, all other employments, arts, mysteries and occupations, honest, middling, and dishonest; forasmuch as he hath at sundry times and in diverse places, told truth unto the men of this generation, and eke to the women : moreover, forasmuch as he hath kept a pair of boots that did not fit, and doth not admire Sheil's play . . .—he prayeth your Worships to give him a lodging.*

(*Signed*) *Count de Cockaigne.*"

Keats, Letter to George and Georgiana Keats. Feb. 24th, 1819.

ALL THE REST

SHEFFIELD STAR

We feel that Gordon Linacre's article on Pamela Keily's final production at Sheffield, is worth reproducing in its entirety. It appeared in the Sheffield " Star " of Thursady, July 8, 1947—and is a fitting tribute to her five years of work for the Sheffield Association of Christian Communities. We are grateful for permission to reprint it.

" The STAR "

THURSDAY, JULY 8TH, 1948

BY GORDON LINACRE

YOUNG ACTORS ARE BRILLIANT IN FINE HISTORICAL DRAMA

Extravagantly used superlatives in Hollywood and other " blurb " have made it very difficult for the critic to impress his reader with a dazzling array of adjectives.

So to convey that a production is really exceptional he must either concoct a word of new dimensions or make his honesty very apparent.

I ask you, therefore, to believe me when I label *Murder in the Cathedral* as a great achievement in youth drama.

By any standard—and I exclude no medium of drama—it would be adjudged good. Recognize the age and inexperience of its cast, and it is almost unbelievable that so much could be accomplished.

A Revelation

The producer, Miss Pamela Keily, Religious Drama Adviser to the Sheffield Association of Christian Communities, is nationally known for her fine work in this field.

Nevertheless, the height to which she has raised her young company is remarkable.

It is a revelation of the capabilities of untrained youth, and no youth leader or drama-minded club member should miss the production.

I am told it has finished its run of public performances—a totally inadequate number of three—but it must not be allowed to pass yet.

A week at one of the smaller theatres in the city should be arranged.

Talented Players

I suggest that Miss Keily speaks at each performance and, unless it is too much a secret, explains how she gets her results. The players in *Murder in the Cathedral* are aged from 16 to 22 and taken from a number of clubs affiliated to the Sheffield Association of Girls' Clubs and Mixed Clubs.

About the murder of Thomas à Becket, this unique play is a great work of literature, beautiful and inspiring.

The cast will not mind if I single out Barry Clayton, 17-year-old Heeley boy, whose Becket is memorable. He has a great stage future if he wants it.

Girls Triumph

Truly astonishing, however, is the performance of the six girls who form the chorus of Canterbury women.

They could not have been blamed had they registered only a brave try at this supremely difficult piece of stagecraft.

In this event the whole production would have collapsed.

The fact that it did not and that Miss Keily knew it would not, is the reason I call it a great achievement : a new landmark in youth drama.

Northern Ireland. The Down and Dromore, and Connor branch of the Religious Drama Society recently produced *A Man's House* by John Drinkwater. The play was presented on three evenings in Belfast and then in Ballymena, Co. Antrim, and Armagh, the Ecclesiastical capital of Ireland, where it was also enthusiastically received. This was the first occasion on which the Society had gone outside Belfast and the play made such an impression on the audiences in these two towns that there is no doubt that the Society will be invited to take its next big production to these centres. Of the thirteen male parts in the play, ten were played by clergymen.

The Down and Dromore, and Connor branch of the Society has only been in existence for two years but is rapidly taking its place in the work of the Church in these Dioceses.

The Mothers' Union is holding an all-Ireland Conference near Belfast in the autumn and the President has invited the Society to present a play to the delegates on one of the evenings at this Conference. On this occasion we hope to produce *First Corinthians* by H. F. Rubinstein.

The Society's future plans include a non-residential week-end school which will take place before the members embark on further productions next winter.

JOYCE STANLEY.

Southampton. The critic (whether he be an amateur or a professional one) seldom has such an easy and pleasant task as the one which confronts me now in writing of the last performance of Andre Obey's *Noah* presented by the Wayfarers Dramatic Society at the Avenue Hall.

This was an excellent production by Cicely Deverill of a play which might be considered to be not everyone's cup of tea, and it had been played by a less talented company, directed by a less understanding producer, it might have failed in all the essentials. It was, however, a triumph for everyone concerned, and the prolonged applause at the end of the performance was ample proof that the audience enjoyed and appreciated it as much as the critic. It was well staged, with good settings and costumes, lighting and effects, and with a cast who understood what they were doing and were perfectly at one with each other in conveying the spirit of the play to the audience. Movement, grouping and "chorus" work were all of a high standard, and audibility was perfect—I heard every word, however quietly spoken. . . .

Cicely Deverill produced with fine insight and imagination and fully deserved the ovation which she received. . . . (From "Critics Panel", *The Prompter* Southampton Theatre Guild Magazine).

Salisbury. During the Festival of the Friends of Salisbury Cathedral in June, an Historical Mime called *Tapestry*, written and produced by Daphne Pearson, was performed by the Avon Players. The large numbers that flocked to see it indicated the great local interest that had been aroused by the venture.

An explanatory note in the Programme gave the argument somewhat thus: "A modern author who has written a play on the history of Salisbury Cathedral, has wandered into the building, and there he sees his play being enacted. But his subconscious mind, personified by a jester, takes charge of the proceedings, and adds far more than the author intended." Personally, I felt that it would have been better to have presented the eleven episodes without the pseudo author and jester, for they failed either to convince or to hold the mimes together, but I appreciated Mrs. Pearson's difficulty—she wanted two good speakers to explain what was happening, and this device gave them to her.

The Episodes portrayed personalities and events connected with the first two hundred years of the Cathedral's history. They were given with all the scrupulous accuracy of dramatic detail that miming demands. The splendid timing was particularly noteworthy in so vast a building, and I have nothing but praise for the beauty

of colour and grouping that Daphne Pearson achieved. All the mechanics of stage-management were masterly. Pages moved seats and properties on the huge uncurtained stage, in a way indicative of the most careful planning and rehearsal. Indeed, there was an almost film-like perfection and precision about these things.

With the history and spirit of that devout and austere medieval period, whose very walls and pillars were providing the setting for the scenes, Daphne Pearson was less happy. It is a perilous business to weld together the fictitious and the real, and to achieve something that rings true. I found myself asking, " Were there no ordinary, poor people in those days ? And was there no music ? "

EVELYN HART.

Harpenden. The St. Nicholas Religious Drama Fellowship is gradually gaining ground since its revival in November, 1946, after lapsing during the War Years. During the past winter the Fellowship met in the Church Hall on five occasions for play readings, and Vera Arletts' play *Infinite Room* was produced in the Church School Hall in the early autumn, and attracted a good audience. The season was brought to a very successful conclusion by the production in the Parish Church on November 20, 21, and 23, of Elisabeth Heward's Easter pageant, *And Ye are Witnesses*.

The *Herts Advertiser and St. Albans Times* reported :—

" The B.B.C. is doing much to bring home the power of the Scriptures to the younger generation by its powerful broadcasts to schools, so it really behoves the churches to rise to the opportunity of improving upon them by dramatising them with visual performances. The Harpenden Religious Drama Fellowship connected with the Parish Church seems to be doing this very successfully.

Performances of the play by Elisabeth Heward, *And Ye are Witnesses*, were given in the Parish Church on Saturday, Sunday, and Tuesday, and it is safe to say that the congregations, which in themselves were large enough to testify to the interest aroused, went away impressed and happily inspired with the general result, which was to clothe the words of the Scriptures as they describe the chief events in the life of Christ, with life and vitality. . . ."

It is hoped to make even more headway next season, and we are hoping to increase our Membership, so that we can stage a Nativity Play at Xmas.

Glasgow. The Diocese of Glasgow has formed a Company to be known as " The Sanctuary Players ". The Executive Committee have appointed Mr. J. Hetherington to produce the play *Holy Night*. It is hoped to present this play during Advent in some of the city churches.

A Drama Course under the general direction of Miss Nathalie Callender has been running in Glasgow since January, and the members of it, largely drawn from St. Mary's Cathedral A.Y.P.A., provided the last part of the programme with a performance of Sierra's *Holy Night*. This was a fitting climax to both the end of their course and to the Festival. This striking play depicts Christmas Eve in a Spanish city, when the statues of the Cathedral come to life and go into the slums, where everybody is keeping Holy Night without the slightest idea of its true meaning. The large cast brought out well the reaction of the various characters. That the play had got across to the audience was obvious from their rapt attention during the performance and by the long sustained applause which followed the curtain. Miss Callender, as producer, was given an ovation on her appearance in response to repeated calls.

Ely. The Friends of Ely Cathedral commissioned Drama Christi to perform a play in the Cathedral's South Transept, as Drama's contribution to their Festival in June. The Company gave there the first performance of a new play, entitled *The Covenant* devised by their Director, Rev. Rex Parkin, who has followed the style of Henri Ghéon.

The material is taken largely from the Bible but is interspersed with contrasting passages of original comment—often amusing and always satirical—in the idiom of to-day. The action as a whole attempts to summarize in dramatic terms what the Bible is really about.

In the opinion of one R.D.S. observer, the experiment is a striking success. The range is vast, and the compiler must have had headaches about what to include and what to omit. As given at Ely *The Covenant* played, continuously, for one hour and forty minutes; certain cuts could be made with advantage to improve the balance between episodes and—perhaps—to make room for an Annunciation scene, which is unexpectedly lacking. When minor adjustments are made in the light of its performance it is hoped that the compiler will make his script available to the R.D.S. library, for although it was written to be acted by a particular highly-trained company of four persons it is likely to be of great interest to all who are looking for really effective ways to present Holy Scripture in Drama.

The play is a powerful addition to Drama Christi's repertoire and performances will be given in St. Albans Diocese and the London area in the coming months.

R.D.S. NEWS AND NOTICES

THE ANNUAL MEETING OF COUNCIL was held in London on June 1st with Miss Athene Seyler in the Chair. The following retiring officers were re-elected to serve during the year 1948–9 :

Chairman: Miss Athene Seyler ; *Vice-Chairman*: Mr. Leonard Crainford ; *Hon. Treasurer*: Mr. John Trustram ; *Executive Committee*: Mrs. K. M. Baxter, Mr. Oliver Bell, Mr. E. W. Bishop, Mrs. Martin Browne, Miss Diana Carroll, Miss Freda Collins, Mr. Leonard Crainford, Rev. Noel Davey, Lt.-Col. R. C. Grant, Miss Pamela Keily, Mrs. P. J. Lamb, Mr. Herbert Malden, Rev. John Mortimer, Rev. Rex Parkin, Rev. Hugh Ross Williamson, Miss Ruth Spalding, Rev. R. N. Spivey. Three vacancies were left for co-options [1] by the Committee, of which Mr. Martin Browne is Chairman.

The Hon. Treasurer presented the Society's Accounts for the year ended 31st March, 1948.[2] In his report he warned that the small deficit shown on the Income and Expenditure Account would, on a sober estimate, be increased alarmingly at the end of the current year unless additional sources of income, providing at least £500, were found.

The Vice-Chairman read a report from the Executive Chairman, Mr. Martin Browne, who had been prevented from attending, dealing with the Society's history during the past year, and the action taken by the Executive. Mr. Browne showed that despite grave financial difficulties the Society was more alive than ever with great opportunities before it. He asked for the utmost effort in support of the Society and stressed the paramount necessity for prayer.

The Council, in accepting both reports, discussed many of the issues raised and ways of improving the Society's present position. Finally, the meeting (to which delegates to the informal Regional Conference held earlier in the day were invited) was addressed by three members from different parts of the country : Rev. Wrigley (Hampshire), Mrs. Elisabeth Heward-Bowyer (Derbyshire), and Mr. Oliver Wilkinson (Glasgow), who between them gave an illuminating picture of the value, variety and scope of the work the Society exists to promote and assist. The Chairman summed up in a few heartening remarks and the Council was adjourned.

[1] Mr. Clive Sansom has since been co-opted to the Committee.

[2] Members wishing to see a copy of the Accounts are invited to apply to the Secretary.

FROM THE TRAVELLING ADVISER

Christmas Play.

I am gathering together a small company of players for a Christmas production in London this winter. The play will be presented in church or hall wherever wanted in the London area during December and January.

I would, therefore, be glad to hear from experienced actors (especially men) who would like to take part; also from churches and organizations wishing to engage these players.

Sheffield. At the request of Pamela Keily and as a representative of R.D.S. I was present on July 3rd at a service in the Cathedral when the first seven people were commissioned as Religious Drama Advisers for the Sheffield Christian Community Council.

This is a brave experiment and they need our prayers and encouragement. It is hoped that these people who have been trained under Pamela Keily for some years will now venture out as producers wherever they are invited in their locality. Pamela Keily has set an exceedingly high standard which will be hard to follow, but we believe in this group and we wish them every success.

The following day I had the joy of watching a performance of *Murder in the Cathedral* produced by Miss Keily. The cast was drawn from Youth Club members from various quarters of the town. Most of these young people had no stage experience at all, and yet within the three months rehearsal period they had become so completely at home with the play, its poetry and its very heart, that they gave the most exciting performance of the play that I have ever seen.

Worcester. A One-Day Conference of Religious Drama was held on July 10th. This was sponsored by the Adult Religious Education Committee with the intention of forming a County Religious Drama Association.

I gave two lectures and took a Demonstration Rehearsal. A most interesting reading was given of *The Old Man of the Mountains*, by Norman Nicholson, by the Avoncroft Players, and the programme ended with a general discussion.

The Conference was well attended, and there is every hope that a lively county organization will now be formed in affiliation with the R.D.S.

Edinburgh. By the time this is read, the Festival School of Religious Drama at the Gateway Theatre will be over. The students attending the advanced course directed by E. Martin Browne, will have been rehearsed daily by him and Enid Lindsay, of the Gate and many London theatres; they will have had a variety of sessions including Mime (Miss Doreen Woodcock), and Group Creation of plays (Oliver Wilkinson, Director of Drama, Community House, Glasgow); and they will have heard Athene Seyler lecture on " Some Aspects of the Contemporary Theatre ", Robert Speaight on " Some Religious Plays of Our Time ", E. Martin Browne on " The Firstborn ", Rev. G. Candlish and Oliver Wilkinson on " The Kirk and Drama ", and Miss Middleton and Mr. Campbell White on " Possibilities of Religious Ballet and its Interpretation " . . . All this and the Festival too!

" Per Ardua ex Aspidistra "

Genuine comments from members of the Chichester Summer School.

" I did feel that we worked a little too hard. . . ."

" Thank you so much for that tranquil week. . . ."

" Exhilarating. Brilliant tuition. It surpassed even Birmingham, 1947."

" My first connection with R.D.S. I have learnt so much that I feel as if I had entered a new and fuller life ; it has been a great privilege to live in a truly Christian Community, with every member out to serve every other member."

" I was surprised to learn how much was going on among amateurs and what enthusiasm there is all over the country, as I had never come across it before ; most interesting, as my experience has been only with the professional theatre."

" It would have been good to have a School photograph ; there are so many people I want to remember."

" A glowing remembrance—a very real and happy fellowship."

" The fellowship and instruction were a real inspiration : thanks for everything."

" I learnt a great deal and enjoyed the course very much, receiving much inspiration from individual people and great help too, from the experience of living in a Christian Community. My only criticism is of myself: I couldn't understand Rev. Gilbert Shaw ! "

" The complete success of the organisation (domestic and tutorial) was deepened by the tone emanating from the unobtrusive but prayerful attitude of the Staff and Students."

" The wonderful spirit prevailing during the whole week was, I'm sure, felt by everyone, and we returned refreshed, inspired and very, very, humble."

" I tell you, it 's shaken me out of my aspidistras more than somewhat."

A full report of the two schools, Chichester and Edinburgh, will be included in the next issue.

LIBRARY.

The following have been added to the Library since the last issue of *Christian Drama* :—

**The Dinner Party*. A Missionary Playlet in one scene. S. L. SMITH. Edinburgh House Press. 9d. 6 m., 6 w., 1 b. Rome at the end of seventh century. A letter arrives from Augustine giving news of the conversion of King Ethelbert. Familiar arguments against converting the heathen are put forward by some of the guests.

**Five Joyful Mysteries*. Plays for older children and adults by the Rev. F. H. DRINKWATER. The Sower, Lower Gornal, Dudley. 1/-. (First Mystery simplified from *Gabriel's Ave*, fourth from *Presentation in the Temple*.) First two suitable for Christmas.

**The House of Mary*. A Gospel Play for Passiontide and Easter. By a Religious of C.S.M.V., G.F.S. 2/6. 8 m., 3 w., eight scenes. In modern idiom, interspersed with hymns and quotations from the Prophets and Gospels. Simple and dramatic. Easy to stage. Specially suitable for young people.

**I Will Arise and Other Plays*. T. B. MORRIS. Muller . 7/6. (Plays also published separately at 2/-). Includes : the modern morality of the title, first presented by E. Martin Browne in the ruins of Coventry Cathedral, 14 characters, 1 act; and *The White Horseman*: 6 m., 8 w., in which a group of people are faced with the immediate ending of the world.

**The Order of the Passion*, as given by Winchester College in the Cathedral. Printed at the University Press, Oxford. 1947. Words taken entirely from the Gospels.

**Pathfinder*. HILDA CHAMBERLAIN. Epworth Press. 2/-. 9 m., 2 w., 3 b., 1 g. 7 tableaux figures. By his faith and sincerity a young minister brings life to a dying village church. Imaginative, good dialogue. But a more human and less perfect character would have better shown the saving grace of Christ. As it is the minister, rather than God, is the hero.

**A Play of St. George*. JOHN MASEFIELD. Heinemann. 6/-. Written to celebrate the 600th anniversary of the Foundation of the Order of the Garter. 9 m., 8 w., The Christus. Supers. After disposing of the (human) dragon, George chooses martyrdom, and is taken off to his death. He reappears in the spirit world and is led to the Christus by Radiant Spirits. Beautiful in thought, style and word.

**The Stable Manger.* JESSIE POWELL (Typescript). 5 m., 3 w., symbolising different types of humanity. 2 semi-choruses representing the God-centred, and the non-God-centred sections of humanity. Voice of Christ. A Christmas Play in modern idiom with a direct message for the times.

**Supremacy.* THOMAS C. KEMP. Allen and Unwin. O.P. 12 m., 3 w., Brethren. 3 acts. Scene throughout. Refectory of the Benedictine Abbey of St. Peter, in Kent, 1535. A powerful and dramatic tale of the Dissolution of the Monasteries.

**Then Will She Return.* LESBIA SCOTT. R.D.S./S.P.C.K. 2/-. 9 m., 7 w., Shows the glorious heritage of the Church and the daily problems confronting her servants in twentieth century. Toured with great results by the Tavistock Players.

**Thor With Angels.* CHRISTOPHER FRY. H. J. Goulden Ltd. Canterbury 2/-. Canterbury Festival Play. 1948. 9 m., 3 w. Scene. Jutish Farmstead. A.D. 596. The struggle in the mind of a chieftain between the pagan gods of his father and the new " One God " of Augustine. Robust verse.

Unto the End. WILFRED GRANTHAM. New Plays Quarterly. 1/8 6 m., 4 w. One act. A disreputable tavern outside Jerusalem on the night of the Crucifixion. Barabbas, Longinus and a Traveller who knew Jesus as a boy, come in. Barabbas meets with a violent end. A play of realism, good characterisation and dramatic power, though the advisability of allowing imagination to play to this extent with Biblical characters may be questioned.

**Dark Noel.* L. E. THOMAS. Muller. 2/6. 6 m., 2 b., 29. Tableau of Holy Family, and 2 angels. One scene : a cave. Time of war, or the aftermath of war. Fugitives meet on Christmas Eve, a vision of the Holy Family brings comfort and joy. Simple to produce and stage. Specially good for Youth Clubs and Schools.

Reprints

The Cradle Song. GREGORIO and MARTINEZ SIERRA. French. 4/-.

The Nursery of Heaven. Compiled from Ancient Sources by PHYLLIS M. POTTER. U.L.P. (Previously known as *The Chelmsford Nativity Play.* 1935.) Can beplayed by children only, or by children and adults. (To be published shortly.)

Sets now Available

I Will Arise. T. B. MORRIS.

Supremacy. THOMAS C. KEMP.

Then Will She Return. LESBIA SCOTT.

The Third Day. SHIRLEY ST. CLAIR. (Passion Play in Typescript.)

We regret that through an error the name of the author of *The Hermit of Treves* and *The Abbot and the Woman*, was omitted in the notice of *Six Short Religious Plays* last quarter. They are both by ELISABETH HEWARD.

When books they send for are to be *purchased* will members kindly make this clear. In the absence of definite instructions it is taken for granted that they are to be borrowed from the Library.

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